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ABSTRACT

Intended for use by instructors of upper division speech courses, this paper describes a questioning and answering technique for teaching argumentation. The first section of the paper discusses the concept of argumentative exchange, which is defined as an episode between two or more individuals wherein one or more feel that differences of belief exist. This section also discusses the various divisions of argumentative exchanges. The second section deals with questions and answers during argument and focuses on choosing the argumentative episode, sequencing and styling the questions, and limiting the analyst's interpretations. The third section explains how to apply questions and answers to the teaching of argument and offers suggestions for incorporating the technique into various classroom situations. (FL)

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS AS A MEANS OF TEACHING ARGUMENTATION*

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"Despite our conviction that forensics is truly at the heart of a good liberal arts education, the activity appears to many as a 'frill,' and--albeit valuable--an expensive one at that" (Zarefsky, 1980, p. 122). Because my experience in forensics does influence my classroom activity, I have accepted this opportunity to discuss questioning and answering as a teaching tool for argumentation.

The paper consists of three segments: a concept of argumentative exchange, questioning and answering during exchanges, and applying exchanges in class. Much of these notions are drawn freely from my work with cross examination debate. One hopes that these casual observations may reaffirm, enlighten, or amuse those who come into contact with them.

The Argumentative Exchange

An episode between two or more individuals wherein one or more believe differences of belief exist represents the operational definition of an argumentative exchange for purposes of this paper. Three words or phrases require at least a bit of clarification therein; "episode," "two or more," and "differences of belief."

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The term, "episode," taken from the concepts developed by Pearce and Conklin (pp. 77-78), describes the smallest unit perceived by the person analyzing the exchange. At one moment, of course, one might see an exchange between husband and wife about using birth control pills as a unit. Again, in the next moment, the analyst might see the whole marriage as a unit of exchange. Finally, the "episode" might be one question and one answer (either expressed or implied) between the husband and wife. Whatever judgment is made, the episode still represents the focus of the analyst.

The second term requiring clarification is "two or more." Movement studies have demonstrated group solidarity regarding issues. Similarly, fantasy theme and rhetorical vision analysis suggest that people view situations based upon group experiences which vivify certain interpreations of events. Therefore, an argumentative exchange is not limited to the perceptions of the participants but to all those who come into contact with the exchange. The differences between Iowa Senator Jepsen and President Reagan regarding the sale of AWACS generated an exchange which reversed the Senator's public stance and vote on the issue. But Iowans not even near the exchange are currently engaging in their own analysis of the event, making the episode something totally distinct from what may have occurred for the two direct participants in the exchange. For further study of this event, one might wish to examine the election results of Iowa for United States Senator in 1986.

Finally, the term, "differences of belief" requires elaboration. Herein, special note is needed to indicate that only <u>one</u> need to think there is a difference to make the exchange argumentative. One need only remember exchanges with subordinates, who interpret a wish as a command, and rebel to know the importance of this sort of clash. As a young teacher, this writer observed a principal instruct an ink-tatooed youngster to "have that off by morning."

The boy's parents took the advice literally. They sandpapered the boy's hand, removing skin as well as ink. The parents interpreted the advice as part of an argumentative exchange, and judged that their son needed punishment for losing the exchange.

Divisions of All Argumentative Exchanges

As developed elsewhere, this writer believes that argumentative exchanges consist of disputes regarding place, stand, and the relevant (Henderson, 1978, pp. 113-114). Examining these three elements from the perspective of an argumentative exchange might yield greater insight.

Stasis emerges within the mind of the analyst of the argumentative exchange. Consider the following situation from several different points of view, and this statement may become clearer.

The situation: A plant supervisor and one of his colleagues from another division of the plant are in a meeting of seven supervisors for his company. The regular agenda has been followed until the final few minutes, when the supervisor overhears his colleague say". . . dull-witted about this."

The dialogue: "Are you calling me dull-witted?"

"If you think I am."

The argumentative exchange for the supervisor, the colleague, and the other five attending the meeting, the exchange is different. The episode clearly represents differences of belief between individuals. The place of clash, according to the supervisor, is concerning his mental capacity. To his colleague, the place of clash relates to what the supervisor believed. And the five others attending the meeting would each see the dispute differently.

The example should yield insight into questioning and answering. The questioner asks only after reaching a tentative judgment about the event. Similarly, no answer is given in a vacuum. And outsiders (whether rhetorical critics or casual observers) similarly engender "worlds" which define what they observe.

An episode encompasses a second stage, for participants assume "stands." As one watches a replay of the 1980 television debate between Ronald Reagen and Jimmy Carter, Reagan's stand emerges as defender of his honor, forcing Carter into a stand attacking it. One episode within the debates alluded to Carter's budget management while Governor of Georgia, which put Carter into a position of opposing big government but as a failure in Georgia. Another episode made Reagan argue Carter wasn't a leader. Whether the candidates wanted the stand rarely mattered. The episode emerges within each recipient's mind.

The resolution for an argumentative exchange occurs when the analyst unravels irrelevant strands, revealing the actually ultimate questions, which may (or may not) be answered. This will close the episode. A recent murder trial in Waterloo concerned a man, indicted for murder of his wife. The prosecutor accused him of pushing her down a flight of stairs. An extended episode provides one example of the unravelling which occurs in an argumentative exchange. The woman's body had many injuries. Pathologists revealed that they were not incurred by falling on a level surface. They were not inflicted prior to the final injury and death. Nor were they just from falling down the stairs. Several head blows were not consistent with injuries occurring when falling down stairs. Finally, a bloody wooden plank found at the scene of the crime was identified as the probable instrument which causes some of the woman's wounds.

The argumentative exchange consisted of the episode between the Prosecuting Attorney and the Pathologist. Once the territory (place) was established, the stands were indicated. Then, the irrelevant details were eliminated, and a judgment could be made. The following model should aid reader understanding.

Argumentative Exchange Model

Question: (Prosecuting Attorney) Did you examine the woman's wounds?

= Stasis (How did the woman get the mortal wound?)

Answer: (Pathologist) Yes, I did.

= Stands
1. Pathologist will say that the wound could have been caused by blows and a push down the stairs; couldn't have been caused by only one of these states.
2. Defendant will say that he did not inflict the wound, nor is he sure that the Pathologist is correct.

= Judgment

1. Analyst decides the Pathologist is right, and/or
2. Analyst decides the Pathologist is wrong, and/or
3. Analyst decides something else.

The model reveals that the exchange may or may not move in a straight line. Further, the model suggests that the judgment may or may not be as anticipated by both or either of the participants in the exchange. In fact, since the analyst might be either of the participants or an outsider, the judgment is probably going to consist of ALL of the possible conclusions. From this perspective, attempts at teaching the process become vital to students. This writer contends that, given the structure, a participant can influence the content. But this requires consideration of the two central participants in the argumentative exchange, the questioner and the witness.

Questions and Answers During Argument

Elsewhere, this writer commends a system for developing cross examination questions for debaters (Henderson, 1978, pp. 112-118). But the system presumes the existence of the esoteric game of debate. Much of this writer's system can be used in any argumentative exchange. This section discusses choosing the argumentative episode, sequencing the questions, styling them, and limiting the analyst's interpretations.

Choosing the Episode

First, the questioner must choose what to ask. When we choose to argue, is determined by what Bitzer would call the rhetorical moment. That moment will usually emerge based upon the time available, the disputants, the substance, and the occasion. Does the questioner have time to consider everything about which disagreement exists between the questioner and the respondant? If not, then which would yield potentially beneficial reduction of distance between? Does the questioner have sufficient skill to inquire about any of the potential topics remaining and can the witness be made to yield on those topics? Does the occasion generate circumstances which would influence the answers?

Sequencing Questions

Second, the questioner must sequence the questions. Based upon the earlier discussion of the argumentative exchange, one could look to territory, position, and quibbles as key words to provide appropriate stages for the

managed episode. Inquiring how one feels about baseball intimates a territory: sports, but leisure time or the Chicago Cubs might have emerged contingent upon what followed. Asking a friend about the weather may be establishing the territory for more intimate inquiry, but it is a necessary preliminary for specific episode management at times.

Once a territory in the episode has been established, the questioner will secondly want to force (permit?) a stand for the adversary. As suggested above, the "territory" question(s) may be quite ambiguous. In a dispute between persons who know each other well, the stands are often well-rehearsed (and known) in advance. But the context of the stand may influence the outcome of the exchange for the intended recipient. For example, were a conservative and a liberal arguing in a town meeting, all intended recipients (voters) would know the stands each would take regarding sex education in the classroom. But when the territory is academic freedom and freedom from government intrusion into the schools, the stands become less obvious. The outcomes, therefore, may differ.

Taking a stand does not always yield the obvious conclusion. The proper question may force an adversary to backtrack or side-step. For example, one who opposed open immigration policies for Soviet defectors would be hard-pressed when asked to take a stand regarding differences between these defectors and those who emigrate from Haiti.

Third, the sequence for questioning usually includes unravelling irrelevant elements. This preempts opponent's objections. More probative questions might emerge, as in the murder trial mentioned above. But the episode won't satisfy the questioner unless the quibbles are dispatched. Selecting the Presidential candidates through Presidential Primaries can be supported.

But the Iowa Caucus as a good system would need to clear away such quasi-issues as when the Caucuses are held and the undue publicity generated by the date before gaining willing assent for the system. Questions should close off false turns, not force travel through a maze.

Styling Questions

Proper answers require properly phrased questions. Three bits of phrasing advice are to put the verb first, avoid complexity, and ask narrow questions rather than larger and complex questions.

A questioner should attempt to put the verb first when composing oral questions. "Can" means something substantially different from "should." Similarly, "giving" doesn't mean the same thing as "donating." The question, "Can the United States permit the Saudi government to purchase arms from the Soviets?" is not the same as asking "Should the United States permit the Saudi government to purchase arms from the Soviets?" The former asks an inherency question and the latter one regarding the "propriety" of the act. By putting the verb first, the questioner alerts the witness to the nature of the question. And good questioners should want the witness totally alert.

A questioner should also avoid complexity. Asking about Arabs, rather than the Saudis could get the questioner in trouble since the Arab world is no more monolithic than the Communist world.

The questioner who attempts to bridge large distances between adversaries by questions is doomed to failure. Why should a witness be expected to respond with a "yes" or "no" to such a complex question? Small nibbles yield gains and avoid indigestion.

Limiting Analysts' Interpretations

The questioner can no more prevent deviant interpretations of the episode than guarantee successful argument. But proper "closure" of an episode can reduce such results. Closure should include summary, highlighting yields, and avoiding losses. A husband who manages to get agreement from his spouse to spend more recreational time in the back yard should avoid extending the argument to include building a back yard pool. That would come later.

Similarly, the questioner, as analyst, must affirm or deny prior judgments about the adversary. These judgments can be improved by proper review questions. Just as a microscope requires fine tuning, so does an analyst's interpretation.

Questioners shouldn't attempt to accomplish everything with their questions. Conclusions need substantial discussion, and the questioner won't get that from questioning adversaries. So the analyst should view the exchange as merely part of an argument.

Answers During Argument

When engaging in controversy, roles are reversed frequently. Questioner at one moment, a person becomes the witness at the next. Successful witnessing generates successful controversy. The successful witness must know the purpose of witnessing, have a methodology, and how to force favorable decision rules upon the adversary.

Purpose of Witnessing

The central purpose in witnessing is to broaden understanding of the witness position. For example, when husband wife argue about driving the kids to a school, both have decided who should perform the task. The wife asks, "What have you got to do when the kids need to be driven to school?" The husband's answer pertains to his plans, not hers. The husband's purpose is to let her know why he's not the driver.

A lawyer advises, "Don't volunteer anything. Just let me lead you," to his client. The witness wants to broaden understanding of his position.

Methodology for the Witness

The witness should focus upon the data, claims, and warrants. The witness therefore becomes a filter through which information flows. And only supportive (or at least less negative) information filters into testimony.

Is the data damaging? The witness needs to diminsh the damage. Consider two students arguing. "I've done the research for the assignment. You write it up." A witness responds, "But I did the analysis, so things are still equal. You do a draft and I'll polish it." From this perspective, the witness recreates a balanced condition. The damage is diminished.

Are the links hurting your position in an argument? You must either strengthen (your own) or weaken (their) links, usually by shrinking or stretching the distance between the data and the claim. The argumentative exchange between client and consultant may be about the cost per consulting hour. A witness may be asked, "Why are your costs so much greater than your

competitors?" His response, "But their services aren't as comprehensive as ours." Distance is established between the data (the competitors' fees) and the claim (outrageous prices).

Similarly, claim values may be reduced by a witness. "But that doesn't cover all of this circumstance," when appropriate, does reduce the claim. Witnesses can frequently reduce import by qualifying answers.

If a witness is knowledgeable about an argument, the responses can be broad, inviting additional inquiry. If the witness is ill-informed, the responses should be narrow, defensive, and withdrawn.

In summary, the witness methodology consists of filtering information; reducing the legitimacy of questioner arguments based upon faulty links, data, and claims. Additionally, the techniques should be practiced.

Forcing a Favorable Decision Rule

One way a witness may control an episode is by establishing a favorable decision rule. This section defines the term, then offers one methodology.

The term, "decision rule" refers to the way recipients should choose between the competing viewpoints. When a listener hears two positions, the choice may be made by tossing a coin, by judging the two positions by considering the evidence and picking the position which is best supported, by inventing his own decision rule or using a decision rule provided by one of the participants.

Consider a situation where the data is strongly opposed to the position defended by a witness. The witness must force a decision rule which would be to avoid the data. If the public opposed to the position supported by the data, then a witness could say, "The public view must be adopted." Such a decision rule would lead away from the damaging data.

Similarly, when the numbers support the witness, a decision rule such as "numbers are better than hunches" might work. Opinions oppose? Then "logic must rule here." No real difference between positions and the witness side has presumption? "Don't buy a pig in a poke" might be best.

Witnessing requires more than direct, precise answers. The witness needs strategy. Choosing the best response begins with knowing the purpose of an exchange, continues with developing proper techniques, and ends with developing decision rules which are most favorable for the witness.

APPLYING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS TO TEACHING ARGUMENT

The crusading District Attorney, the buttinsky beginning lawyer, and the brow-beating husband all belong on the scrap heap and not in the questioning business. The modest milktoast, the rapierlike respondent, and the learned lecturer should be avoided when answering. But other models of questions and answers can assist the argumentation teacher. Several suggestions are incorporated below, to aid in finding the place for the tactic.

First, questioning can be employed when students argue a substantive issue in class. For example, a speaker is asked to present a one-point speech which defends a piece of evidence. Questions and answers provide rapid episodes, using little class time. This can be especially useful by forming diads and letting them all perform at once; one-half questioning, one-half witnessing over the piece of evidence. In thirty seconds, all of the students will have practiced either attack or defense. By reversing roles in a second exchange following another one-point speech, all students practice <u>both</u> attack and defense.

Second, questioning permits probes of theory. Why is sign argument less certain than some other approach? Or is it? Permit an argumentative exchange, and a sharper perception may, indeed, emerge for the participants as well as the observers. Could students develop viewpoints on theory? All debate coaches have grown weary of the current tendency of teams to argue nothing else. But classroom exchanges are probably less frequent. The questioning and answering envisioned herein may provide an alternative which would be more favorable.

Third, answering permits a student to become more flexible in argument. No witness ever avoids all traps. And as a result, the exercise permits the instructor to provide this experience in a laboratory environment, where error is less serious. As a matter of course, debaters frequently question their colleagues about arguments they plan to present. This generates refined arguments. Similarly, lawyers give their clients practice sessions. These give witnesses opportunities to familiarize themselves with courtroom conditions. Both as skills acquisition and as a discovery device, serving as a witness can be valuable in the classroom.

Conclusion

Questions and answers represent mutual commitments by the parties engaged in an argumentative exchange. Respect for the opponent, for the process, and for the system for discovering better beliefs are artifacts of using argumentative exchange. But classrooms become auditoriums in the university setting, especially in the upper division classes where argumentation is taught. Utilizing the argumentative exchange, viewed in isolation as a separate episode, may break down some of those barriers of time-utilization we instructors face when

making assignments to our students. The students can develop their concepts of argument and refine their skills by using the question/answer system frequently in classroom activities.

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